

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

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1. (Currently Amended) A method for assisting a customer in choosing among commodities comprising the steps of:
asking the customer for a definition of its business;
searching a decision rules database and applying decision rules to the business definition;
creating a set of business requirement questions based upon the applied decision rules database;
answering-receiving answers to the set of business requirement questions by the customer;
modifying the set of business requirement questions based on the answer received for each question;

implementing a business rule filter to the answers of the set of business requirement questions; and
recommending to the customer commodity types based upon the business rule implementation.

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2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
selecting, by the customer, at least one of the recommended commodity types; and entering at least one of the recommended commodity types selected by the customer into an optimizer device for determining an optimum commodity selection for each of the selected recommended commodity types for use by the customer.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 ~~whereby~~ wherein business requirement questions are the business rules generated through fuzzy logic interactively by the business rules and customer answers to the business requirement questions interactively through fuzzy logic.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the set of business requirement questions includes questions regarding number of employees, expected employee growth rate, whether and how many computers are needed, what type of computer processing is needed, how many telephones and what type of telephone services are needed, if the business has an existing network

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and what type of network, if the customer has an existing Internet connection and what type of connection, the customer's existing building plans, and what type of network security exists and is needed for the future.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of recommending further comprises the steps of:

allowing the customer to de-select at least one of the recommended commodity types;
allowing the customer to request non-recommended commodity types; and
entering the at least one of the recommended commodity types and the requested non-recommended commodity types into an optimizer device for determining optimum commodity selections for each of the recommended and requested non-recommended commodity types for use by the customer.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:
identifying at least one first parameter associated with the at least one selected commodity type;
associating at least one value to the at least one first parameter;
calculating an estimated cost of the at least one selected commodity type based on features of the commodity that are desired by the customer;
obtaining from the customer a preference weighting on at least one second parameter;
calculating an effective cost by adjusting the estimated cost based on the preference weighting and the at least one value assigned to the parameters; and
presenting a list of recommended a subset of commodities to the customer containing including the at least one selected commodity, wherein the commodity is selected based on at least with a lowest effective cost.

8. (Currently Amended) A system for assisting a customer in choosing between commodity types, comprising:

an optimizer device that is connected to a network, wherein the optimizer device includes

at least one database that includes information about at least one commodity type, at least one utility function, and at least one business profile for the customer, and
a processing component enabled to perform tasks including:
receiving answers to a set of business requirement questions,
modifying the set of business requirement questions based on the answers,
and
presenting to the customer a list of commodity types including at least one commodity type based on the business profile for the customer and the utility function for the commodity type; and

a customer device for connecting to the optimizer device via the network and sending business requirement information to the optimizer device;

~~wherein the optimizer device includes at least one database that contains information about at least one commodity type, at least one utility function, and at least one business profile for the customer, and a processing component for presenting to the customer a list of commodity types containing at least one commodity type based on the business profile for the customer and the utility function for the commodity type.~~

9. (Original) The system of claim 8, wherein the optimizer device includes a web server component for hosting a web site and the customer uses the customer device to visit the web site.

10. (Original) The system of claim 8, wherein the utility function is associated with a parameter of the commodity type and is evaluated to obtain the at least one value, wherein the value represents a cost or benefit of the parameter to the customer.

11. (Original) The system of claim 8 wherein in selecting the best commodity for the customer the system considers multiple quantities of a product, including volume discounts.

12. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 8, wherein the business profile of the customer includes information regarding location of the business, number of employees, expected employee growth rate, whether and how many computers are needed, what type of computer processing is needed, how many telephones and what type of telephone services are needed, if the

business has an existing network and what type of network, if the customer has an existing Internet connection and what type of connection, the customer's existing building plans, and what type of network security exists and is needed for the future.

13. (Currently Amended) A system for assisting a customer in choosing among commodities comprising:

means for asking the customer for a definition of its business;

means for searching a decision rules database and applying decision rules to the business definition;

means for creating a set of business requirement questions based on a decision tree that is configured to change in response to ~~upon~~ the applied decision rules database;

means for receiving answers to ~~answering~~ the set of business requirement questions by the customer;

means for modifying the set of business requirement questions based on the answer received to each question;

means for implementing a business rule filter to the answers of the set of business requirement questions; and

means for recommending to the customer commodity types based upon the business rule implementation.

14. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 13, further comprising:

means for selecting, by the customer, at least one of the recommended commodity types; and

means for entering the at least one of the recommended commodity types into an optimizer device for determining an optimum commodity for each of the selected recommended commodity types for use by the customer; and

means for presenting the customer with a subset of commodities including the at least one optimum commodity.

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Original) The system of claim 13, wherein the set of business requirement questions includes questions regarding number of employees, expected employee growth rate, whether and how many computers are needed, what type of computer processing is needed, how many telephones and what type of telephone services are needed, if the business has an existing network and what type of network, if the customer has an existing Internet connection and what type of connection, the customer's existing building plans, and what type of network security exists and is needed for the future.

17. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 13, wherein the means for recommending further comprises:

means for allowing the customer to de-select at least one of the recommended commodity types;

means for allowing the customer to request non-recommended commodity types; and

means for entering the selected at least one of the recommended commodity types and the requested non-recommended commodity types into an optimizer device for determining optimum commodity for each of the recommended and requested non-recommended optimum commodity types for use by the customer.

18. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 14, further comprising:

means for identifying at least one first parameter associated with the at least one selected commodity type;

means for associating at least one value to the at least one first parameter;

means for calculating an estimated cost of the at least one selected commodity based on features of the commodity type that are desired by the customer;

means for obtaining from the customer a preference weighting on at least one second parameter;

means for calculating an effective cost by adjusting the estimated cost based on the preference weighting and the at least one value assigned to the parameters; and

means for presenting a ~~list of recommended~~ subset of commodities to the customer ~~containing the~~ including at least one selected commodity type, wherein the commodity type is selected based on at least with a lowest effective cost.

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19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of determining whether to optimize the recommended commodity types or create requirements for the customer to use in solicitation of bids through a Request for Proposal process for the commodity type.

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20. (New) The system of claim 13, wherein the means for asking the customer for business definition, means for analyzing the set of business requirements information, and means for recommending to the customer commodity types is implemented on a web server interacting with the customer through a website.

21. (New) A computer readable medium having computer executable instructions for performing actions for assisting a customer in choosing from available commodities, the actions comprising:

determining a customer's definition of its business;
creating a set of business requirement questions;
receiving responses to the set of business requirement questions;
dynamically modifying the questions based on received responses by employing an inference engine;
implementing a business rule filter based on the responses of the set of business requirement questions to determine an optimum commodity selection; and
presenting the customer with a subset of commodities including the at least one optimum commodity.

22. (New) The computer readable medium of claim 21, wherein the presented optimum commodity selection is determined based on lowest effective cost.

23. (New) computer readable medium of claim 21, wherein the business profile of the customer includes information regarding location of the business, number of employees, expected employee growth rate, whether and how many computers are needed, what type of computer processing is needed, how many telephones and what type of telephone services are needed, if the business has an existing network and what type of network, if the customer has an existing Internet connection and what type of connection, the customer's existing building plans, and what type of network security exists and is needed for the future.

24. (New) A method for assisting a customer in choosing among commodities comprising the steps of:

retrieving a set of decision rules from a decision rules database;

dynamically modifying the decision rules through an interactive process based on received responses;

implementing a business rule filter to available commodities based on the modified decision rules; and

recommending to the customer a subset of commodities including the at least one optimum commodity, wherein the commodity is selected based on the business rule implementation.

25. (New) The method of claim 24, wherein the decision rules are initially determined by application of utility functions and optimization equations stored in an optimization database to a business profile.

26. (New) The method of claim 24, wherein the dynamic modification of the decision rules employs fuzzy logic based on received responses.

27. (New) The method of claim 24, wherein the business rule implementation further includes estimated cost and bundling discounts.